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Rural Soldiers Are More Likely To Make Ultimate Sacrifice

Carsey Institute: Rural Casualties Are Disproportionately High In Iraq, Afghanistan Wars

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DURHAM, N.H. –When the nation goes to war, all Americans are expected to make sacrifices. Today's rural Americans, however, are making the ultimate sacrifice in disproportionate numbers, a fact sheet from the Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire finds.

The fact sheet – "Rural Americans Continue to Account for Disproportionate High Share of U.S. Casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan" – is the Carsey Institute's second annual Veteran's Day release of this data, drawn from U.S. Department of Defense records.

"As we observe Veteran's Day this year, it is important for Americans to recognize that rural families are paying a disproportionately high price for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan," says report author William P. O'Hare, a senior fellow at the Carsey Institute.

Rural areas account for only 19 percent of the adult population, but have suffered 26 percent of the casualties. Of the 4,197 American military deaths in Iraq and Afghanistan, 1,102 are accounted for by soldiers from rural areas. That represents a death rate of 31 per million among rural men and women, compared to a death rate of 21 per million for urbanites – a significant increase since October 2006, when the death rate was 24 per million for rural residents and 15 per million for urbanites.

For the second year, Vermont had the highest rural death toll at 61 killed per million adults. As a result, Vermont's combined rural and urban statewide death toll was 47 killed per million adults, the highest of any state in the nation. Delaware had the second highest rural death rate at 60 killed per million adults. Nebraska (57 killed per million adults) and Oregon (56 per million) followed.

O'Hare and co-author Bill Bishop found that higher death rates for soldiers from rural areas are linked to the higher rate of enlistment of young adults from rural America, which in turn is often linked to diminished opportunities there. "Transitioning from youth to adulthood is more problematic in the rural U.S. because there are fewer job opportunities," says O'Hare, who

notes that the unemployment rate among 18–24-year-olds is nine percent in rural America compared to seven percent in urban areas.

“This is a story of American opportunity as much as it is one of the military losses suffered by rural communities,” says Mil Duncan, director of the Carsey Institute. “Traditional rural industries like farming, timber, mining, fishing and manufacturing are employing fewer workers than they have in the past, and competition accompanying globalization increasingly moves jobs overseas. As these opportunities disappear, rural youth are enlisting in the Armed Forces not only because they are patriotic, but also to find a path to a more promising future.”

To read the full report, go to <http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/documents/FS9.pdf>. For more information about the Carsey Institute, go to www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu.

The Carsey Institute at the University of New Hampshire conducts research and analysis on the challenges facing families and communities in New Hampshire, New England, and the nation. The Carsey Institute sponsors independent, interdisciplinary research that documents trends and conditions affecting families and communities, providing valuable information and analysis to policymakers, practitioners, the media, and the general public. Through this work, the Carsey Institute contributes to public dialogue on policies that encourage social mobility and sustain healthy, equitable communities.

The Carsey Institute was established in May 2002 through a generous gift from UNH alumna and noted television producer Marcy Carsey.

